Higher Education in Japan: Status and Tasks
A Keynote Address

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I deem it a great honor to share with you my long held views regarding the status and tasks of higher education in Japan.

In Japan the term "higher education" generally refers to postgraduate schools, universities and colleges, junior colleges and higher specialized schools. In my presentation, I would like to concentrate on the postgraduate schools, four-year universities and junior colleges, which form the core of higher education in Japan.

When reviewing Japan's history of higher education, it can be clearly seen that the nation's educational policy has been greatly influenced by the prevailing national goals established at the time of the Meiji Restoration. The national goal of Japan following the Meiji Restoration was to introduce Western civilization into the country and thereby accelerate the process of modernization so as to build a affluent and powerful nation. To that end, it was considered necessary to elevate the educational standards of the entire population through compulsory education -- a process first initiated in 1872. From this foundation a national educational system was created which extended from the primary to the university levels.

The central purpose of the government's higher education policy was to establish national universities designed to turn out people of critical importance to the state. The government strived to organize higher education around national universities. By 1943 there were nineteen state-run universities and a few private universities producing many graduates who contributed to the modernization of Japan. It is no exaggeration to say that the national universities remained the centerpiece of the state's policy of education, while a few private universities, with all their distinctive features

evolving under difficult conditions, complemented them.

This situation changed considerably after the Second World War. The national, public and private universities quantitatively expanded, especially the private universities which had a remarkable rise. There are a number of reasons that help to explain the quantitative expansion and great elevation in status of the private universities. First of all, postwar Japan changed its national educational objective of the Meiji Restoration, dropping the goal of "strengthening" from the policy of "enriching and strengthening the country." All of the nation's energies were now devoted to the construction of a wealthy, democratic society. As a consequence, the scope and volume of its activities grew incomparably larger than in the prewar period. For instance, peak steel output as an index of the development of the Japanese economy was about forty times that immediately before the Pacific War. The extent of the development of the Japanese economy today is obvious in that it accounts for 14% of the world's total gross national products.

This national development has not been limited to the economy but is also evident in the domains of science, culture and international exchange. A large number of people with higher education training are required to sustain the activities of Japan now that it has so greatly expanded. This situation has therefore accelerated the Japanese expansion and development of university education. Before the war, the number of students enrolled in university education represented about two per cent of the total population of eighteen year olds. Today that percentage is 36.7%. In the postwar period many new national and public universities were established, increasing the student population. At present, there are 133 national and public universities and 94 national and public junior colleges for a total of 227 national institutions of higher education. The number of private universities now stands at 357 with an additional 447 private junior colleges. The enrollment at national and public universities is about 465,000 students with 40,000 students enrolled in national and public junior colleges. The number of students enrolled at private universities totals about 140,000 with about 404,000 students studying at private junior colleges. Private universities and junior colleges therefore account for about 78% of the total number of students enrolled at national, public, and private universities and junior colleges. This fact alone

testifies to the conspicuous advance of higher education in Japan and to the increased importance of private establishments in higher education.

A second reason for the expansion of private universities is that the institutions and idea of democracy introduced into postwar Japan have inspired the people with the ideal of equality. As I have previously stated, since only two per cent of the eighteen year old population entered courses of higher education in the years before the Pacific War, it could be assumed that the students' origin of social strata was highly limited. The equalitarianism which spread among the population after the war helped break down this class boundary and paved the way for young people from all walks of life to advance to institutes of higher learning. An excessively high value placed on academic background also emerged at this time and grew parallel to the egalitarian spirit, thus enabling private schools to expand and develop quantitatively.

The third factor to be taken into account is the fact that the postwar economic development of Japan led to such an increase in income that a wider segment of the population could afford to receive higher education. As the notable economic growth of Japan enriched the life of the average citizen, more and more parents were capable of sending their children to private universities. In short, as the volume of Japanese economic and social activity ballooned, calling for a greater number of people equipped with higher education, a spirit of egalitarianism and the worship of educational background spread through a population with expanding income. This complex situation formed the basis which made it possible to enroll many people at institutes of higher learning, sharply boosting the postwar population in higher education and leading to the quantitative rise of university education.

While Japan's higher education has thus followed a path of remarkable quantitative growth since the last war, there are a host of qualitative issues that are now demanding attention. The most urgent of these issues is that higher education is now at an age where efforts ought to be launched to improve the quality of university study and education. As university faculty and administrators, this is a challenge we must assume especially in light of the social behavior of our country, the enhancement of its international status and its significant role in the world.

The first factor that we must consider is that advances in science and technology and the development of industrialization have brought to our society

a new prosperity and life of convenience. Great transformations are occurring in all regions of the world including Japan. We therefore find ourselves in an turbid age in which nobody knows the future consequences of current dramatic changes. And this era promises to remain complicated, fluid and turbid for a long time and, indeed, will grow more and more so. If that is the case, the present level of cultivation of people of ability will be insufficient. In the future, Japanese society will demand that the universities turn out graduates with higher levels of education.

Secondly, we must be aware of the fact that the worship of academic background or the placing of undue emphasis on educational attainment will not readily change. There will be no change in the desire of parents to give their children better jobs and higher positions or in their thinking that their children should be provided with a university education so as to obtain these better jobs and higher positions. However, it is also evident that the basis of the merit system is steadily spreading. There is no denying that the practice of rating a person in terms of not so much his or her schooling but rather with what competence he or she is equipped, is a growing trend.

Consequently, if a particular college fails to equip its students with sufficient capabilities, that institution's educational abilities will be called into question. An idea is being progressively disseminated in Japan that if a student obtains a working mastery of skills at a non-university school which provides practical skills, he or she will earn better treatment in society and a promise of a more attractive future than if they enter a lower grade college.

This means that universities or colleges of lower grade will gradually lose their *raison d'etre*. Subsequently, the universities and colleges will need to initiate several efforts: 1) to elevate the level of studies and education of teachers as educators and researchers; 2) to make constant efforts to improve the curriculum in response to changing times; 3) to positively react to the increase in expenditures mainly for research and education; and 4) to improve the facilities and equipment.

In this connection, Japanese higher education must face a third important challenge. As I have mentioned, the paramount goal of Japan following the Meiji Restoration was to modernize. An important step needed to achieve this task was to know what were the experiences of nations advanced in

the process of attaining modernization. The Japanese saying, "learn from Europe," illustrates how the advanced nations have been our model of modernization. It has been of critical importance to us to know what western nations have thought about and done in response to modernization and to apply this knowledge to the process in Japan. It is no exaggeration to state that one emphasis in Japanese education has been to impart Western knowledge. However, in recent years there have been fewer countries that Japan could emulate as good examples. Though it is still important to learn from others, it has no longer become sufficient merely to accumulate a wealth of knowledge.

Viewing the future as a puzzling, fluid and turbid era, we are going to face a variety of things that are unknown to us as far as our experience is concerned. Partly to cope with such an eventuality and partly for Japan to contribute to the international community, it is imperative not merely to absorb knowledge from others, but to conduct a new kind of education designed to strengthen the creative ability and thinking capacity of the Japanese people. My guess is that the universities will be called upon to place greater stress on improving the students' capacity to pinpoint, reason and judge a question at issue, to think out possible responses, giving free rein to the rich powers of conception. In these terms, the present method of education is insufficient. It is important to shift from an education centering on instruction in large classrooms to the education of fewer students, that is, to accord greater value to the training of a small number of people. It is also essential to develop a teaching method that cultivates the powers of thinking and to redouble efforts to prepare facilities and equipment for that purpose.

Another important problem is that the population of 18 year olds will decrease in and after 1992. By 1992, the population is estimated to stand at 2,050,000, and then will begin to shrink and fall sharply by 2005 to 1,360,000. This prediction indicates that the universities will find it very hard to find students, even if the ratio of students applying to them increases to some extent. An examination of the current status of university enrollment in this country shows that one of its characteristics is the concentration of students in large urban areas. Since the student population tends to mass in large cities, such as the Minami-Kanto region centering on Tokyo, the Kansai region with Osaka as center, and the Chukyo region focusing on Nagoya, the

continuation of this trend is likely to adversely affect universities and colleges situated in local areas. In a new trend, the desire of students is shifting from junior colleges to four-year schools. Most of the students at junior colleges are female, and more and more females will want to advance to four-year universities. In this sense, the local universities and junior colleges must be prepared to face a particularly difficult situation. These trends highlight the need for the universities and junior colleges to project their own attractive features and aggressively involve themselves in the lifelong education of adults.

In summary, the future of Japanese society will require the universities to turn out persons with higher capabilities. If any college proves to fall short of these requirements, and considering the prevailing tendency towards the merit system, the public will think less of that institution. With the anticipated future decrease in the population of eighteen year olds, it will be necessary for private universities which operate mainly with independent funds to make a serious response to such a situation.

How should the private universities react? I am afraid that there are few effective countermeasures except to raise the quality of their respective research and education programs through individualization and diversification. As a matter of course, the universities are organizations whose job it is to engage in study and education. Therefore, the faculty members are charged with simultaneously undertaking research and education. Given the popularization of higher education, I believe that there ought to be various kinds of universities with some emphasizing research and others underlining education. In other words, universities should be individualistic. It is important that they should improve and expand as a response to their unique individual character and special features. There is no reason whatever for all the universities to be stereotyped by a single model. Rather, by emphasizing their individuality, the universities will be able to project their own characteristic features and charms. The current standardization of university education and research is due in part to the standards placed on the establishment of universities by the Ministry of Education. In my opinion, these standards need relaxing.

Another way to promote individuality among Japan's universities is to reconsider the present forms of the departments as units of research and

education. Since the Meiji Restoration, the departments have usually formed the organization of research and education around separate branches of science. However, this is not the sole system of research and education at a university. Especially as we enter an increasingly involved, capricious and turbid age, fields of science once dismissed as subjects of knowledge will become very important. Moreover, research into the overlapping areas of separate branches of science, namely, interdisciplinary studies, will take on important implications as subjects of learning. In such a future society, phenomenon will become difficult to comprehend from the viewpoint of one single science. The social demand will be for individuals equipped with the power to approach a given question from different angles.

Considering these several factors, there should be research and educational institutions that will utilize the accomplishments of separate disciplines of science to instruct students with the capabilities needed to face up to the foremost challenges confronting human society. In this connection, the general education offered in Japan's universities warrants a fundamental overhaul. The important goal of general education to train students in logical thinking, to develop a broad perspective and judgment, has yet to be attained, and there has arisen the call for revision. Given the idiosyncrasies of the future, I firmly believe that this question should be accorded sufficient consideration in the interest of higher education's qualitative improvement.

Japanese universities have a further question to be put on the front burner. It concerns the postgraduate schools. Judging from the background of their postwar creation, Japanese postgraduate schools seem to have received less attention than undergraduate education. In this respect, the Japanese postgraduate schools are extremely different from their American counterparts. As far as their actual functions are concerned, our postgraduate schools have been devoted mostly to the training of researchers. Since society will remain involute, fluid and turbid for a long time, there is no doubt that people with higher capabilities will be in greater need in various fields of society. In the past, our businesses have thought that they only needed to recruit students who obtained a university undergraduate degree and then provide them with the necessary in-house education. However, I am certain that this practice will no longer be sufficient. Indeed, there have appeared

signs in various areas of the need to produce professionals with high levels of capability.

Although in our country there are some professional schools, they are so few in number that we can say such institutions virtually do not exist. It is true that postgraduate schools of science and technology have recently grown in importance as a result of the advances in those fields and the requirements of the economic community. However, postgraduate schools in the humanities and social sciences have had their functions limited to the training of researchers and have done little in practice to educate professionals equipped with high levels of intellectual power. This is a common characteristic of the national, public and private postgraduate schools.

Quite frankly, the research and educational conditions of the postgraduate schools, including their facilities and research spending, are not necessarily in good order. It is important therefore to strengthen the view among faculty members that postgraduate school education deserves more attention. Since practically nothing has been done to train highly competent professionals, it is necessary to divert much greater energies to that task. This is why the University Council at the Ministry of Education is now repeatedly discussing the question of improving and expanding the postgraduate schools.

The last question I would like to address concerns financing to sustain university research and education. The national and public universities are managed with state or public funds, which raises the question of whether the amount of the appropriated state or public funds is proper. The indications are that the expenditures are anything but satisfactory. Recently it has become easier for national, public and private universities alike to receive donations from the private sector as a result of industry-university cooperation. However, I do not think this source of funding has become a firm practice.

About 16% of state subsidies are granted to private universities, but the per-school share is decreasing as the years go by. At present, the eighteen year old population is in a period of sharp growth and consequently the private universities do not seem to be suffering from any financial difficulties. This simply means that their so-called "minimum needs" are being met. However, as long as the operation of these institutions rely on tuition fees from students, it is inevitable that they will be constantly faced with a variety of issues.

Considering that the eighteen year old population will shrink in and after 1992, private universities will soon be faced with a serious economic challenge.

There are also problems of international exchange, the admission of foreign students and the improvement of university research conditions. The international exchange issue is an especially important agenda item which is rapidly gaining public attention in proportion to Japan's rise in international standing. Yet, for all the efforts being made by the government and the universities in this area, their response is still belated. As for the issue of improving research conditions, I would like to remind you that the universities have a legion of issues to sort out, such as the reform of their conservative research organization, the improvement of research facilities and an increase in research budgets.

In brief, Japan's higher education is at a crossroads. Let me conclude my report by observing that the first job of university faculty and administrators is to properly perceive the status of higher education and to show aggressive enthusiasm for its reform so that the universities can respond to the situation and find correct answers to these many questions.

Thank you very much for your attention.